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Executive power is the name of the shakeup game

The most divergent analyses have been made of President Ford's recent hiring and firing policy. Some see it as a triumph for "doves" — hardliner Schlesinger is out, and Kissinger's policy of detente is shored up. Others see it as a triumph for "hawks" — Colby was yielding too much at the CIA, and Bush has been called home to stonewall Congress.

Some see Rockefeller's exit as a triumph for the right. Some see it as an unleashing of moderate Republican pressures checked by Rockefeller's presence at the top. Some see the thing as a drive toward a new SALT agreement, and others as a move to meet Ronald Reagan's threat (it can hardly be both).

Further personalize these different readings, and you get the marvelous but inconsistent equations of TV and newspaper commentary with regard to this event. Did Kissinger win over Schlesinger less than Rumsfeld won over Kissinger? Did Reagan win or lose by Rockefeller's leaving? Does the right wing miss James Schlesinger more than it loves Rockefeller's doom? Does anybody love Donald Rumsfeld? Does anybody not dislike William Colby? Where, through it all, was Mel Laird? What did Brent Scowcroft know,

and when did he know it?

How can one make sense of such contrary indicators? One way is to find the common denominator in all these differences. At first, there seems to be none. But look closely. Is Ford being "soft" — on detente or "tough" — on secret intelligence? Will he creep with Rumsfeld or growl with Bush? The common denominator is executive power in both cases. Ford's policy was one of detente, no matter what James Schlesinger had in mind in his dealings with Congress.

And the Ford policy is one of executive privilege, no matter what Sen. Church and Rep. Pike have in mind in their committees. It is interesting, in this connection, that Rogers Morton, who has defied a congressional subpoena for Commerce information on the Arab boycott, is also leaving office. This does not get him off the hook of the subpoena; but he may hope to stall things until he leaves office, or hand the decision over to someone who will be staying on.

In other words, when Ford says he wants his own team, he means he wants to strengthen executive prerogatives now under assault. This applies to budgetary matters (where Schlesinger was joining congressional demands against the President), to the handling of

Turkey, to arms for various sides in the Middle East, to control of the intelligence agencies — and, down the road, to other matters as well (like the SALT agreement and the Panama treaty).

It is indicative that Ford had to back down slightly, in letting Colby continue his dealings with Congress while George Bush is being confirmed. The preliminary signals were that he might have to do this in order to get Mr. Bush confirmed. And Colby's lawyer, Mitchell Rogovin, who has been cooperating extensively with the intelligence committees, was expressly included in the invitation to hang around awhile. That concession locates the area of Ford's concern in all the recent changes — it was all part of the reassertion of executive power.